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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3952

INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 8153

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LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA

DEPT FOR NEA/ARPI (WALKER, SHUKAN, JACHIM), INL, DRL
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: RUMORED SAG CABINET CHANGES

REF: 2006 RIYADH 07150

Classified By: Ambassador James C. Oberwetter
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Abdul Wahab Al-Faiz, Editor-in-Chief of several Saudi newspapers and magazines, told PolOff on January 6 that within the next month or two (approximately before the end of March), the King will announce major changes in the SAG Cabinet. He said these changes will be in accordance with the expiration of the four-year terms of Cabinet ministers, which will occur some time after January 20 (reftel). Al-Faiz gave two examples, saying that it is very likely that Prince Saud Al-Faisal will no longer be Foreign Minister and Ghazi Al-Gossaibi will no longer be Labor Minister. He implied that there could be other changes as well. He did not state who will be named as replacements, though he suggested that Prince Bandar might be named Foreign Minister.

¶2. (S) Al-Faiz said that Al-Gossaibi never had the background or experience to be Labor Minister and has found the job very frustrating. Al-Faiz said that Al-Gossaibi has faced much criticism for the pace of changes regarding labor policy as well as much resistance from religious and business leaders for announced reforms.

¶3. (S) Al-Faiz said that reports that Turki Al-Faisal and Prince Bandar are in conflict are untrue. Al-Faiz pointed out that the two have worked together well for many years, especially when Turki Al-Faisal was the head of the General Intelligence Presidency (GIP).

COMMENT

¶4. (S) Since this would be the first such Cabinet change under King Abdallah, local observers, such as Al-Faiz and Al-Tuweijri (reftel), expect important high-level personnel changes that will strengthen the SAG's ability to enact reforms. (NOTE: Abdel Rahman Al-Tuweijri is the Secretary General of the Supreme Economic Council, head of the Capital Markets Board, and a member of the Royal Protocol. His father, Abdul Mohsen, is the closest non-royal advisor to the King and former head of the National Guard. His brother, Khaled, is the new Secretary General of the Succession Committee. The Al-Tuweijri extended family is a large, prominent, and powerful bloc in the KSA. END NOTE). In addition to Al-Gossaibi and Prince Saud Al-Faisal, there are rumors that the Petroleum, Higher Education, and Culture and Information ministers may be replaced. The loss of Al-Gossaibi could be a setback for labor reforms, though his substantial skills could be better used elsewhere. There

have been rumors for at least the last two years that FM Saud Al-Faisal will retire due to health reasons. Recently, other sources name Prince Turki Al-Faisal, who is currently in Riyadh, as the potential replacement for Saud instead of Prince Bandar. END COMMENT.

OBERWETTER